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Viewing cable 09BERLIN1108, GERMANY: POLITICAL FALL-OUT OVER KUNDUZ AIR

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BERLIN1108	2009-09-10 06:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Berlin

Appears in these articles:

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VZCZCXRO2166
OO RUEHSL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 001108

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMANY: POLITICAL FALL-OUT OVER KUNDUZ AIR
STRIKES CONTAINED -- FOR NOW

REF: A. BERLIN 970
[1](#)B. BERLIN 837

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Chancellery is confident that Chancellor Merkel's policy statement to the Bundestag on September 8 has succeeded -- at least for now -- in settling the domestic political controversy surrounding the September 4 air strikes against two hijacked fuel tankers in Kunduz. Ironically, the Greens called for the special parliamentary session in a clear attempt to embarrass the government and to make a campaign issue out of the controversy, but Merkel used it to her advantage to elicit support for the German deployment in Afghanistan by all the major parties, save for the Left Party, which has always opposed the mission. While it had been expected that internal critics would seize on the bombing to score political points against the Chancellor and Defense Minister Jung, the Chancellery, MFA and MOD all expressed dismay that their closest Allies -- especially the French -- had made a rush to judgment. Officials at both the MFA and MOD also expressed disappointment that despite Germany's excellent track record in avoiding civilian casualties, COMISAF GEN McChrystal, in their view, quickly assumed the worst about German actions in this case. The MOD emphasized that while everything was calm now, this issue would need to be carefully managed in the coming weeks to prevent it from becoming a source of anti-Americanism. Both MFA and Chancellery officials emphasized that the joint German-UK-France proposal for an international conference on Afghanistan was not made in reaction to the Kunduz event and is not a cover for trying to secure a date certain for withdrawal. END SUMMARY.

Chancellor's statement

¶2. (C) In her policy statement to the Bundestag on September 8, Chancellor Merkel appealed to ISAF allies as well as critics at home to reserve judgment regarding the September 4 decision by the German PRT commander in Kunduz to call in air strikes against two fuel tankers that had been hijacked by insurgents. At the same time, she promised a full inquiry into the matter and gave assurances that Germany took the issue of collateral damage very seriously. "Even the death of one innocent person is one too many," she stressed. In retreating from the initial stand taken by Defense Minister Jung -- who had insisted that only insurgents had been killed in the nighttime attack -- she succeeded in deflating some of the early indignation over the incident, since Jung's statements seemed to defy clear evidence to the contrary. All the major parties, with the exception of the Left Party, which opposes all Bundeswehr deployments, used the special Bundestag session to reaffirm their support for the Afghanistan mission and to reject calls for withdrawal.

Chancellery: "astonished" at allies' reaction

¶3. xxxxxxxxxxxx

Mod: jung's initial approach was wrong

¶4. xxxxxxxxxxxx

¶5. xxxxxxxxxxxx

¶6. xxxxxxxxxxxx

¶7. xxxxxxxxxxxx

Comment

¶8. (C) With only three weeks before German national elections, it goes without saying that the Kunduz incident comes at a very politically sensitive time. Fortunately, the Chancellor, in her policy statement to the Bundestag, has been able to limit the damage to the delicate political

consensus here in favor of the Afghanistan deployment. She has successfully rallied all the main political parties in rejecting calls for withdrawal. The hope is that the Allies and others will refrain from any further premature judgments or speculation about what happened in Kunduz, which could be exploited by the Left Party and other Afghanistan opponents for electoral advantage.

¶9. (C) The Kunduz incident ironically also comes at a time when the views of the United States and Germany regarding the approach to Afghanistan have never been closer. All of our interlocutors warmly welcome COMISAF's new counterinsurgency guidance, which emphasizes protecting the Afghan population over chasing down and killing insurgents. They view the new U.S. emphasis on avoiding civilian casualties as moving toward a position they have long advocated. At the same time, they now acknowledge that their own forces, in view of the deteriorating security situation in the north, have to be more active in providing security and being willing to use force as appropriate. Their new rules of engagement (ref A) have gone a long way in this regard. Along similar lines, the old debate between the U.S. and Germany on the best way to train Afghan police -- i.e., the U.S. supposedly stressing speed and quantity versus the Germans stressing quality -- is over. The Germans have completely signed up to the U.S. focused district development (FDD) police training program and are moving toward taking responsibility for FDD throughout the north (ref B).

¶10. (C) It is this convergence of views, and their belief that they are one of our most reliable Allies in Afghanistan, that makes the Germans so sensitive to any perceived U.S. criticism of their actions. They feel that their careful and dependable management of the north -- while acknowledging the growing problems with the insurgency there -- have earned them the benefit of the doubt when incidents like the fuel tanker bombing in Kunduz occur. As we go forward with our plans to deploy some 300 U.S. Special Forces in Mazar-e Sharif to assist the Germans in meeting the growing insurgency threat, we will want to be careful not to give the impression that we do not have faith in the Germans to do what is necessary to continue to secure the north as they have been for almost six years. While the Germans have been consistently reluctant about deploying combat troops outside the north, they have been equally consistent in ensuring that all the troop and equipment needs in the north -- including OMLTs for the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) -- are fulfilled. It is our interest for the Germans to continue to feel "ownership" of this part of the country.
Murphy